

Wildlife Restoration/Hunter Education Advisory Team

Advisory 2020-016 - REVISED: Providing Incentives for Participation

September 17, 2020

This Advisory supersedes the Advisory 2020-016 issued July 7, 2020



Revision: The WR/HE Advisory Team received responses requesting that the Team revisit and reconsider Advisory 2020-016 on providing incentives in support of R3 efforts. In revisiting the topic, we have concluded that the original Advisory was narrowly interpreted, and this revision expands the topic to provide increased opportunities.

Can Wildlife Restoration funds be used to purchase goods and services to incentivize recruitment and retention of hunters and recreational shooters?

Discussion - Review of incentives and allowability:

The discussion in this Advisory is intended to provide guidance and evaluation considerations when a State wants to include a cost/activity as an “incentive” under a Federal award. This revised advisory clarifies concepts for use of incentives that will allow WSFR to consider them in a grant proposal.

An incentive is something that motivates or encourages someone to do a desired behavior or action; it stimulates a reaction or response. It is important to understand the concept, because when a State offers an incentive, there is an expectation that the person receiving the incentive will provide something back to the State in return. When using incentives under a WSFR Federal award, the desired behavior or action must link back to the objectives of the award. The grant proposal must show the causal connection between the “incentive” and achieving results in the form of the “desired behavior or action” that supports the objective of the award. For this discussion, the desired behavior or action must support recruiting, retaining, and/or reactivating hunters or recreational shooters.

Certain costs that may appear to be unallowable under 2 CFR 200, could be allowable when they are eligible and support the Federal award. Regulations state that, “determination as to allowability in each case should be based on the treatment provided for similar or related items of cost and based on the principles described in §§200.402 through 400.411. In case of a discrepancy between the provisions of a specific Federal award and the provisions below, the Federal award governs. Criteria outlined in §200.403 Factors affecting allowability of costs must be applied in determining allowability. See also §200.102 (see §200.420 Considerations for selected items of cost, emphasis added). This provision in the regulations does not open the door to any and all activities but allows the Federal agency sufficient discretion to consider costs allowable when supporting the public, program purpose.

Under the Modernizing PR Act, there is opportunity for a wide range of activities that could include costs/activities that would be considered “incentives” for meeting a purpose of the program for “promoting hunting and recreational shooting.” All incentives offered under the Modernizing PR Act using funds authorized at 16 U.S.C. 669c(c) and 16 U.S.C. 669h-1 MUST support recruiting and

retaining (and reactivating) hunters and recreational shooters. To assist WSFR grant managers in understanding the causal connection between the incentive and its effectiveness in achieving desired results, grant proposals should include:

- Details on specific costs and activities, showing costs are properly allocated to funding sources,
- Support for how costs are necessary and reasonable,
- Explanation for the measurable expected results that are achievable and realistic, and
- Details that show that the approach is substantial in character and design (see 50 CFR 80.56).

When a grant proposal is written with enough detail to make a justifiable case that the costs associated with incentives directly support recruiting and retaining hunters and recreational shooters, it makes it easier to get to determine that it is allowable.

There are various types of incentives that are already allowable under the regulations at 2 CFR 200, including:

(1) Compensation (Payment) Incentives: Some incentives are given in the form of compensation and used to motivate a desired action that benefits the organization or execution of a project. Compensation rewards an individual for an activity that provides a benefit. Compensation is for “services rendered” and those services have some flexibility. These types of incentives are generally allowable when meeting other standards and included in the Approach of a Federal grant, describing how using the incentives support execution of the grant to meet stated objectives.

(a) Some grant program incentives offer funds in exchange for making private benefits publicly available. The Wildlife Restoration and Sport Fish Restoration programs offer incentives by purchasing easements and other real property rights from private landowners for habitat conservation and recreational access (TRACS includes fields to indicate when these “incentives” are provided). These types of incentives are common and acceptable as it encourages an exchange that provides a proportional benefit.

(b) Compensation incentives may be offered to participants that support the agency to cover certain costs (compensation or advance payment) that make it more feasible or attractive for individuals to participate in an activity that assists the agency, especially for those who otherwise would not be able to afford to participate. Incentives paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees in connection with conferences, training, etc. are allowable and may take the form of direct costs for items such as stipends or lodging allowances, travel allowances, and registration fees paid to or on behalf of participants or trainees in connection with conferences, or training projects (see 2 CFR 200.456). These can be used for hunter education volunteers or mentors/teachers/instructors. These costs are allowable, and a State agency may use coverage of these costs to incentivize participation.

(c) States may use incentives within their agency to promote employee participation in certain activities focused on reducing costs, improving efficiency, expanding effectiveness, etc. States interested in this should contact their Regional WSFR office for more information.

(d) Payment incentives for services rendered are used to encourage individuals to actively participate in an activity as an extension of the State agency, to fulfill roles that the agency itself cannot. These incentives may be in the form of compensation in exchange for the assistance to the agency. For example, if an existing hunter or recreational shooter were offered compensation to incentivize them to engage a non-hunter or non-recreational shooter in an activity to introduce or further

train/support them in the activity, this would be allowable. The existing hunter or recreational shooter is providing a service in support of the objective of the grant.

(2) Supplies as incentives: Supplies that have a purpose toward the objective of the award and that help individuals to more fully and effectively participate in an activity may be considered allowable. For example, the purpose of the award is to recruit new hunters. In order to participate in the hunter safety class participants must wear a certain amount of blaze orange, and each receives a blaze orange hat and vest to use during the class. Upon completion of the class, participants can keep the hat and vest for use in future hunting activities. This would be allowable. Items must be included in the Approach used to support the objective of the award, be necessary and reasonable, etc.

(3) Gifts: If the “incentive” is a gift that people simply receive or have an opportunity to receive without the recipient of the gift providing a commensurate reaction or response that supports the award, it is unallowable. There is no direct benefit back to the State agency that helps the agency meet the objectives of the grant. It needs to be part of the strategy to recruit, retain, or reactivate. For example:

(a) “Costs of promotional items and memorabilia, including models, gifts, and souvenirs” are considered advertising and public relations items under 2 CFR 200.421 and are unallowable as they promote the State agency and not the Federal grant.

(b) Incentives in the form of giveaways (*Stuff We All Get* aka SWAG) that the State agency purchases to simply hand out to people that attend an event, visit the agency-sponsored booth, etc. would likely be unallowable. It is important to ensure that when an incentive is offered, that it has a purpose and a connection to the desired reaction or response, and that the desired reaction or response is sufficient to clearly support recruiting, retaining, or reactivating hunters and recreational shooters. For example, handing out keychains at a Wildlife Expo is likely unallowable, but giving participants three target arrows when hosting an introduction to archery event would be allowable.

(4) Costs of contributions and donations: Any contributions or donations from the State agency to any other entity is unallowable (see 2 CFR 200.434).

Advisory:

When a State strategically uses incentives to motivate or encourage members of the public to desired behaviors or actions that stimulate a reaction or response to support recruiting, retaining, or reactivating hunters and/or recreational shooters, it may be considered eligible using funds at:

- 16 U.S.C. 669c(c) (R3)
- 16 U.S.C. 669h-1 (Enhanced Hunter Education/R3)